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SOME RECENT BOOKS ON SOUTHERN LITERATURE.

During the past two years there has been quite a revival of interest in the history of literary conditions at the South, both before and after the war. This has shown itself in several books that treat of the literature as a whole or that deal with individual authors and their works. In the latter may be included the excellent little edition of the "Select Poems of Sidney Lanier," by Dr. Morgan Callaway, Jr., and the yet uncompleted series of Professor W. M. Baskervill and Professor S. A. Link. Dr. Baskervill's series of "Southern Writers" is a most praiseworthy attempt to furnish biographical data and critical estimates of post-bellum writers. The numbers that have appeared treat of Joel Chandler Harris, Maurice Thompson, Irwin Russell, Sidney Lanier (triple number), and G. W. Cable. They are written in a graphic and entertaining style, and the material they contain is full of value and has been gathered from many out-of-the-way places at a great expenditure of time and trouble. Their critical dicta are thoroughly sane, and following in the wake of the "William Gilmore Simms" of the editor of this REVIEW, they accomplish what he did—they give critical estimates that are impartial and unprejudiced and that are not gushing and without due perspective. Professor Link's series—"Pioneers of Southern Literature" is not so successful. Only four numbers have appeared—"A Glance at the Field," "Paul Hamilton Hayne," "Ticknor and Timrod," and "William Gilmore Simms." These are interesting, but in reading them one feels that they are inadequate. There is a little tendency to gush, and when a writer can give a whole number to Hayne, and only half as much to Timrod (who is seemingly classed with Ticknor—a poet of melody and fire, but hardly worthy to unloose the latches of Timrod's shoes), the inevitable conclusion is that that writer has failed to appreciate fully historical perspective.

Still, Professor Link's efforts are deserving of great praise, and his series will do much towards reviving the memory of many worthy writers that are now nearly forgotten.

The two books dealing with Southern literature or poetry as a whole that have recently appeared are Miss Louise Manly's "Southern Literature" (1895) and Miss Jennie Thornley Clarke's "Songs of the South," (1896). The first is a history, though there are numerous illustrative selections, while the second is an anthology. Miss Manly's book has had several predecessors—all dating, strange to say, from just after the war when the South was in the throes of reconstruction and literature was at its lowest ebb. Among these one recalls Professor J. Wood Davidson's "Living Writers of the South"—a collection, evidently made with great industry, of biographical sketches and running critical comment, with occasional selections. As far as concerns its critical value it is worthless; in fact, it is a hodge-podge of undigested material and deserves rather to be called a rambling dictionary than a history. It contains many facts of interest, but arranged in such a shape and written with so little regard to perspective that a reader at times almost despairs of getting any profit from it. Mrs. Mary T. Tardy's "Living Female Writers of the South," and "Southland Writers," (Mrs. or) Miss Mary Forrest's "Women of the South," though totally lacking in perspective, are much better written and arranged than Professor Davidson's book. There is but little in them of permanent value, however, as most of the writers of whom they treat are mere exotics.

Miss Manly's book is an improvement over all these. The author seems to realize that it is better to show the intensive rather extensive character of Southern literature, and so her history omits more than mention of a large number of real and so-called authors. Her biographical introductions are well written, though entirely too meagre in some cases; and her selections are generally well made and representative. The list of Southern writers at the end of the book is valuable, though it doubtless contains errors

(which are inevitable from lack of accurate information) and though many of the names have long since been deservedly forgotten. On the other hand, the great defect of the work is that of its predecessors — an utter lack of historical perspective. Hardly any greater stress is laid on a truly great writer like Poe than on a number that can lay no claim to literary preëminence, as for example Robert Toombs. One, too, cannot help wondering at the fatuity that can treat at length Francis Lister Hawks, James Wood Davidson, Henry W. Grady, etc., and can mention only by name George W. Cable and Lafcadio Hearn. The trouble seems to be that the author has not properly distinguished between pure and ephemeral literature — between what De Quincey would call the literature of power and the literature of knowledge. As to the mechanical execution of the book, one adverse criticism must be made: it is disfigured with a number of very crude cuts that do not speak well for art at the South, if they were made here. What possible connection there can be between the picture of a cow-boy on a Texas prairie and a history of literature is beyond this writer's comprehension.

Miss Clarke's book is a worthy compilation and in a sense supplies a long felt want. There have been numerous publications of the war verse of the South, nearly all of which are worthless as poetry, but never before have the best lyrics of Southern poets been collected by themselves. No Northern publication, except possibly the eleven volumes of Stedman's "Library," contains them, and it was very appropriate for Miss Clarke to gather them together. Hardly a favorite poem is omitted, though, to mention one instance, it is to be regretted that Timrod's most charming lyric, "The Lily Confidante," is not there. Still the selection of poets and lyrics is well done, though there is a doubt as to the insertion of certain ones. It is rather hard to see how five "anonymous" poems can be classed as Southern unless it is from their subject and character (which seem certain in only one — "Virginia's Dead") or their place of publication.

Mr. Joel Chandler Harris's brief introduction is well expressed and to the point, but the editor's note is very inadequate. What was needed was a discussion of the development of poetry at the South — its limitations, defects, and general character. Strong dissent must also be made to the editor's statement: "Where authorship is disputed, I have given the poem without assuming to decide the question." On this basis, she assigns "All quiet along the Potomac" to Lamar Fontaine and "The Isle of Long Ago" to Philo Henderson, notwithstanding that the latter is undoubtedly by Benj. F. Taylor (Miss Clarke has made this correction in a recent number of *The Critic*) and that the weight of evidence about the former is in favor of the authorship of Mrs. Ethel Lynn Beers. Mr. Harris and, in a less degree, Professor Davidson have given their opinion that Mrs. Beers was the author — an opinion that seems confirmed by the following letter¹ that has never been published, so far as I know:

" DEC. 3^D, 1866.

" 255 W. 23^D ST., N. Y.

"*Mr. W. G. Simms:*

"My attention was called a day or two since to your volume entitled, 'War Poetry of the South' in which 'The Picket Guard' or 'All quiet along the Potomac' is prefaced by a paragraph in reference to its authorship. The claim of authorship for Lamar Fontaine is no new one to me. Printed copies of the verses in papers from half the states in the Union have been sent me by friends who found such waifs floating about. Surely this mythical Lamar Fontaine cannot sanction such a thing. I can not believe that a Southern gentleman would so far forget the honor and chivalry we associate with the name.

"'All quiet along the Potomac' was written by me in the fall of 1861 for Harper's Weekly and appears in the issue of November 30, 1861. On the books of the Messrs. Harpers appears my name receipting the money for the piece. It became popular and was attributed to many different people, was published in

¹ Contained in the third volume of the "Simms Collections," now in possession of Mr. W. H. Ferris, of New York City, through whose kindness I am able to present this copy.

Boston as Whittier's and claimed in N. Y. for Fitz-James O'Brien after his death. In Harper's Weekly for July 4th, 1863, in an editorial paragraph entitled, 'A question settled' the matter is set right. The poem was set to music in Richmond with Lamar Fontaine's name attached. Mrs. Terhune (Marion Harland) sent it to me last spring with his name erased and mine substituted. In her last book "Sunny Bank" the poem is given at length and a foot-note gives my name. In the volume of War Lyrics published by Bunce and Gregory two years ago my name is given to that as well as another poem which Darley had selected to illustrate.

"But I am sure I need not multiply proofs of a matter which is well known here and that in any new editions you will be kind enough to give my name with the poem.

"Yours respectfully,

"ETHEL LYNN BEERS."

The least satisfactory part of Miss Clarke's book is the biographical appendix. The sketches therein are very scrappy and incomplete, and many of them lack that definite information which might have been acquired by research or correspondence. Their compilation shows the marks of hasty work, and there are several inaccuracies. To mention a few, Theodore O'Hara died at Guerryton, Ala., not Columbus, Ga.; Albert Pike did not die in 1867, but in 1891; Prof. W. C. Richardson is no longer a Professor in the University of Alabama.

CHARLES HUNTER ROSS.